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ABSTRACT

America has two conflicting visions of equality. The first evolved during the American Revolution through the 1960s, which is identified with the phrase "equality of opportunity." The second vision, advanced since the 1960s, embraces the concept of affirmative action to redress social injustices. In an attempt to reach accord on these conflicting visions of equality, the American public school has become one of several major battlegrounds. This paper examines these differing visions of equality as traditional and postmodern concepts, identifies their operational expression in the public schools, and reflects on the nature of America's conflict over equality. It also analyzes educational programs with the most potential to help Americans see each other as equals, and concludes that character education has the most potential for doing so. Character education, it is argued, would be a means for articulating the principles that America was founded upon--equality before the law, equal treatment by the state, and freedom as the guiding principle of society. Character education undergirds an understanding that individual success must be won, not provided. (Contains 139 references.) (LMI)

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"Education's Role in the Struggle for Americans to be Equal in the Eyes of Each Other"

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"EDUCATION'S ROLE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR AMERICANS TO BE EQUAL IN THE EYES OF EACH OTHER"

"Whether we come from poverty or wealth...we are all equal in the the eyes of God. But as Americans that is not enough -- we must be equal in the eyes of each other." (Ronald Reagan, Republican National Convention, Summer, 1992)

Introduction

Historically, America has had difficulty living with the concept of equality and how it should be applied in human conduct. From the American Revolution through the Civil War and to the 1960s, however, a particular vision of American equality evolved, one forged as a traditional part of American character and identified with the phrase, "equality of opportunity." Since the 1960s, however, a different vision of equality has been advanced, a postmodern one incorporating concepts from the liberation movements into our civil rights struggles, a vision embracing the notion of "affirmative action" to redress social injustices, a change altering -- some feel -- the American character. These two visions of equality are in conflict, contributing toward what many observers describe more broadly today as America's "culture wars."[1]

In our attempt to reach accord on these conflicting visions of "equality," the American public school has become one of several major battlegrounds. Its goals, objectives, and programs

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[1] See, for example, William Bennett's The De-Valuing of America: The Fight for Our Culture and Our Children (1992); Peter Brimelow's Alien Nation (1995); Robert Dugan's Winning the New Civil War (1991); Andrew Hacker's Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal (1992); James Hunter's Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America (1991); Mickey Kaus's The End of Equality (1992); Michael Lind's The Next American Nation (1995); Arthur Schlesinger's The Disuniting of America (1992); and so on.

are questioned by both those holding traditional and postmodern visions of equality. As increasing statistical evidence mounts of school violence, out-of-wedlock teenage births, decline of academic standards, unprepared school graduates, teen suicides, and other indicators of a failing social fabric, greater pressure is placed on the schools and their leaders to deal with the consequences of these trends in a fair and equitable manner.

And, if they cannot do so? Then, say some, the Educational Establishment should step aside and open the doors of public education to some other form of education better suited to meet today's needs of a diverse and pluralistic society.

In the following essay, these differing visions of equality are: (1) examined as traditional and postmodern concepts ("What is the nature of 'equality'?"); (2) traced into operational expression in the public schools ("American education in the equality struggles"); (3) reflected upon ("Facing up to America's equality conflict: Some reflections"); and (4) analyzed for an instructional priority with the most potential to assist Americans in seeing each other as equals ("Establishing an instructional priority for Americans to see each other as equals"). School leaders, it is implictly contended, should be prepared to consider the matter.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF EQUAILTY?

It seems inconceivable to begin a discussion on the nature of equality in American society without pointing to its framing as a moral intention at our founding -- that is, offering our first principles and moral starting points as expressed in the Declaration of Independence:

> "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

While this 18th century Jeffersonian moral affirmation (an affirmation heavily influenced by John Locke's work) helped direct the launching of our nation, it had to be translated into the institutions of the new nation, to be converted from a philosophy of government into a universal practice found at-large in our society. Understanding this process is important because we are "a country that was never a nation in the sense of resting on common ancestry but one that depends on a set of beliefs and institutions deriving from Western traditions" (Kagan, 1995. p. 51).

This process of translation, however, has had a long and often sad history. Our initial Articles of Confederation barely sustained us as a country. True, our new Constitution gave us a real nation state. But it also gave us institutionalized slavery; it gave us women and blacks without voting rights; and, at state and local levels, it often gave us other disenfranchised groups -

- conditions hardly in the spirit of equality for such persons. Thus, in turn, it also gave us the American Civil War in the 1860s; and, in the 1960s, it gave us what some call "the Second Civil War" (Hawthorne, 1995), the civil rights and liberation movements -- both conflicts trying to help Americans "get-it-right" about living with an understanding of equality.

We are still trying to get-it-right, and today experience continuing tensions around two philosophical questions: What do we mean by "equality"? And, to what degree is government and its agencies (e.g., the public schools) responsible for guaranteeing equal rights to all?

American "Equality of Opportunity"

Addressing the Dred Scott decision in 1857 prior to the Civil War and using the word,"men," in a universal sense[2], a 19th century leader, Abraham Lincoln, spoke about the "plain unmistakable language of the Declaration," offering us an explication of equality of opportunity: "I think the authors of that notable instrument intended to include all men, but they did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects" (Angle and Miers, 1992. p. 204). Lincoln continues that the Declaration did not mean to say all were equal in color, size, intellect, moral developments, or "social capacity." Rather, the Declaration's authors defined in what respects all men were to be considered

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[2] Even earlier in 1836, Lincoln had expressed his support "for all sharing the privileges of the government, who assist in bearing its burdens," and consequently "the right of suffrage to all who pay taxes or bear arms (by no means excluding females)" (emphasis added, Angle & Miers, 1992, p. 11).

created equal -- equal in "certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Claims Lincoln: "This they said, and this they meant." They did not mean to assert the obvious untruth, that all were then actually enjoying that equality, "nor yet, that they were about to confer it immediately upon them." In fact, says Lincoln, they had no power to confer such a gift: "They meant simply to declare the right, so that the enforcement of it might follow as fast as curcumstances should permit" (p.204). Thus, their aim was to set up a standard maxim for a free society, one which, according to Lincoln, should be familiar to all, and revered by all: "constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere" (p. 204).

Behind Lincoln's words is a history of Western political philosophy on constraints that attend being "equal" in a deomcratic society -- that one is entitled to as much liberty in gratifying one's own desires as one is willing to allow others; that individuals must freely accept self-constraints on their own behavior in exchange for mutual protection from living in a state of anarchy; that all human beings enjoy certain rights that protect them from having certain things done to them by the state or other human beings; that while people differ and, therefore, are unequal, the best way for them to live together is under a

system of equal rights; and that the task of government is to set unequal persons into a community that, as nearly as possible, equalizes their rights while allowing their differences to express themselves.

Lincoln's words were also uttered in the era of a more Biblical-America. As our second president, John Adams, remarked in 1789, "Our Constitution was designed only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other" (Thatcher, 1995, p. 1). It was a time more closely aligned with Max Weber's (1958) description of The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. In such an age, a 90-percent Protestant America saw the "waste of time" as "the deadliest of sins," and the unwillingness to work as symptomatic of a lack of grace. Through a life's calling to work hard and by being industrious, diligent, thrifty, sober, and prudent, one fulfilled his or her religious responsibility to the Lord, and, in the process, took care of one's own and those in the community determined to be unable to care for themselves (those labelled, "the deserving poor," as opposed to the "non-working poor"). Above all, one was responsible for one's own behavior, knowing that on Judgement Day he or she would be held accountable to the Lord for those behaviors. As Christopher Lasch (1995) reminds us: "For those who take religion seriously, belief is a burden, not a self-righteous claim to some privileged moral status" (p. 16) -- "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (James 4:17). For such believers, all are equal in the

sight of God (Romans 3:22, 10:12; I Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; etc.). In such an era, Horace Mann's public schools reinforced this message, a message concomitantly being taught in the home, the church, and the community-at-large -- the publication of over one hundred million copies of the McGuffey Eclectic Readers proclaimed it as an underlying value (Commager and Nevins, 1951).

And as the American concept of equality got shaped further, a giant wilderness frontier worked its spell on the character of all who sought its treasures, levelling many of civil society's inequalities and rewarding those individuals who could survive its harsh treatment. It daily reminded people of life's elemental equalities -- that rich or poor, strong or weak, black or white, woman or man, young or old, at some basic level, all of us must eat, must breathe, must be sheltered from the elements; that all of us must face the certainty of death; and that all of us must accept 24 hours in each day to utilize as we may.

While we share these universal elements of equality among all living things, it is the last equality, the 24-hour day, which, operating over extended periods of time, contributes as a major source to the growth of inequalities. Because each of us use this equal-time opportunity differently -- some more diligently than others -- different outcomes are experienced as a consequence. Thus a dilemma for full-equality seekers arises: in a free society, individual uses of equal time, as represented in the 24-hour day, result in the creation of inequalities.

Historically, equal rights to use the equal-time opportunity have not, however, implied rights to equal outcomes at the end of the day, or beyond. In the tradition of the Declaration, in the tradition of John Locke, in the shaping of the American character, it does proclaim a right -- an inalienable liberty -- for one to possess more property and/or differential rewards than another as long as the equal right of everyone to acquire property and/or rewards is protected. In this sense, equality of opportunity took root in America.

As the equality of opportunity concept evolved in America up to the 1960s,[3] it became characterized as the principles of equal treatment and a fair shake:

> "The principle of equal treatment demands that we all play by the same rules...A fair shake demands that everyone have

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[3] It is remarkable how little the concept changed in its expression from the 19th century to the 20th century, from Abraham Lincoln to Martin Luther King. In his 1961 commencement address at Lincoln University, King said:

> "One of the first things we notice in this (American) dream is an amazing universalism. It does not say some men (are created equal), but is says all men. It does not say all white men, but it says all men, which includes black men. It does not say all Gentiles, but it says all men, which includes Jews. It does not say all Protestants, but it says all men, which includes Catholics....It says that each individual has certain basic rights that are neither conferred by nor derived from the state. To discover where they come from, it is necessary to move back behind the dim mist of eternity, for they are God-given. Very seldom, if ever, in the history of the world has a socio-political document expressed in such profoundly eloquent and unequivocal language the dignity and the worth of the human personality. The American dream reminds us that every one is heir to the legacy of worthiness" (Bennett, 1992, pp. 187-188).

a reasonably equal chance (to succeed)..." (Murray, 1984, p. 221).

Limitations of Equal Opportunity

But putting the principles of equal treatment and a fair shake into action in a society supportive of equal opportunity requires three conditions to be met, argues James Fishkin (1988). Because every modern developed country (whether capitalist or socialist) has unequal rewards and positions to distribute, the issue of equal opportunity within liberal theory is how people get assigned to these positions or receive these rewards -- by which Fishkin means both their prospects for assignment and receipt as well as the methods for making those determinations. Accordingly, a trilemma exists and requires a forced choice among three conditions. These conditions hold: (1) that achievement of desirable positions or rewards ought to be based on merit; (2) that prospects for achieving such positions or rewards should not be predictable on the basis of one's race, sex, religion, ethnic identification, or family background; and (3) that society ought not interfere with the autonomy of the family.

Unfortunately, concludes Fishkin, no society can consistently embody all of these conditions: If one attempts to achieve, say, the second condition, either one must violate the non-interence-with-families condition or alter the basis of merit. Thus, the search for a perfect "equality of opportunity" will never be realized as a public policy. Says Christopher Jencks (1988): "Trying to win general acceptance for any single

'correct' definition of equal opportunity is a fool's game, with no greater likelihood of success than trying to win general acceptance for a single definition of justice or liberty" (p. 48). The best we can hope for, continues Jencks, is recognition that equal opportunity has a number of distinct and contradictory meanings.

We have had a difficult time with the concept possibly because there are so many forms of it -- for example, one group of scholars uncovered 108 distinctive meanings of the term with thousands more possible if additional distinctions are considered (Rae, 1981). These scholars tell us that "because of the anatagonisms between one equality and another, there must always be some inequalities" (p. 144). To attain a radical degree of equality in an established complex society, Rae's group says, is a daunting prospect:

> "Only by effacing social pluralism, by attacking the division of labor, by centralizing allocation in unprecedented and perhaps unimaginable degree, by smoothing out all the 'lumps' that distinguish one status or plot of land or baby from another, by ignoring or bleaching out all differences of human need, homogenizing all human ends, mixing all human tastes, by insisting on absolutes -- only then can the most radical equality ever be brought into practice" (p. 149).

A daunting prospect, yes![4] But that does not mean that improvements cannot be made in the prospects for attaining greater equality, even if an ultimate success appears unattainable, even if all public policies related to equality can be proven philosophically flawed in some aspect. To repeat the opening quotation:

> "Whether we come from poverty or wealth...we are all equal in the eyes of God. But as Americans that is not enough -- we must be equal in the eyes of each other" (emphasis added; Kaus, 1992, p. ix).

Baldly stated, the equality of opportunity creates inequality of results -- winners and losers -- which, in turn, act to limit future opportunities for some while increasing the odds for others. The child who elects to spend time practicing on the basketball court and the one who elects to do math problems on the computer are more likely to increase their future opportunity success rates in their respective activities than children not expending such efforts. Thus, a dilemma arises: If the less-practiced children compete with these children in their respective areas of interest, which should be safeguarded to assure greater equality in the eyes of each other -- the opportunity to compete, or the results of the competition?

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[4] Novelist Kurt Vonnegut (1994, July 29) attempts to describe such a world in 2081, where everybody is "finally equal" -- not only equal before God and the law, but "equal every which way" due to the "211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution" and the vigilance of the Office of "the United States Handicapper General" -- "It seemed like fiction," The Wall Street Journal, p. A10.

Enhancing Equality through Affirmative Action and an Equal Start

In order for Americans to be equal in the eyes of each other, some believe, it is necessary to do more than say: "Here is an opportunity! Let the chickens and the elephants make the most of it." No, that is not good enough, said many 1960s Americans: "No one deserves to be born rich any more than he deserves to be born smart. Nor does anyone deserve the 'superior character' that enables him to work hard or succeed or get rich; nor does he deserve the riches he gains as a result of his character"[5] (Tivnan, 1995, 207). For a society to be just, it must be fair, rewarding neither virtue nor natural talents, but providing all with the basic conditions to realize their goals. For John Rawls (1971), it means founding justice on two principles: the greatest equal liberty and no inequality -- except to distribute economic and social gain to everyone, particularly to the least advantaged.[6]

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[5] William Henry (1994) complains that such expressions represent a "lottery mentality," based on the assumption that "all life is a game of chance, all success accidental, the wealthy and powerful simply lucky rather than accomplished. When daydreams substitute for plans, when wishing seems more appropriate than work, when envy gains yet another rationale, the whole society is the loser" (p. 23).

[6] In Simple Rules for a Complex World (1995), Richard Epstein offers four "simple rules." The first is "individual self-ownership, that is, one owns oneself. Such a "rule" contradicts John Rawls basic principle of justice holding that the individual's own natural talents and abilities are the "collective asset" of the community and that the individual should not get any benefit from his or her own talent unless it helps those less fortunate. Instead, Epstein claims that one owns himself and the product of his labors and, additionally, this way is best for a healthy productive society.

In such a society, equal opportunity to reach one's potential as a citizen is linked directly to one's having an equal start in life, argued Thurgood Marshall. Energized by the fervor of the civil rights and liberation movements, something more was needed to assure the promise of an equal start, especially between groups of people. It is membership in specific groups (e.g., blacks, women, gays, immigrants, and others) that denies a person an "equal start" (Chafe, 1995). Says Andrew Hacker (1992):

> "Our concern...is not whether all human beings everywhere are 'created equal' in terms of personal potential, but whether this tenet apples to the groups of individuals we have come to call races. Here the terms of the argument can allow for ranges of possible talent within racial groups. So what racial equality does posit is that within each race there will be a similar distribution of talents, if all members are given a chance to discover and develop those traits" (pp. 24-25).

Thus, as Thomas Sowell (1984) notes, a different view of equality emerges, one revolutionary in its implications. Whereas the traditional "equal opporutnity" view required that individuals be judged on their own merit without regard to race, sex, age, and so on; the new view of "affirmative-action equality" requires that persons be judged with regard to their group membership, "receiving preferential or compensatory treatment in some cases" -- adds Sowell -- "to achieve a more

proportional 'representation' in various institutions and occupations" (p. 38).

Thus, sets of specific and result-oriented procedures are to be utilized by the government to insure that non-whites and women are not disadvantaged in their efforts to attain equality. The current debate, states W. H. Chafe (1995), is about "understanding the link between an equal start and true equal opportunity; the inextricable connection between group identity and individual identity; and the realization that a law without government's commitment to make its guarantees real is a hollow vessel" (p. B2).[7]

This shift -- both in veiws of equality from individuals to groups and in procedures for its pursuit through active governmental intervention -- was facilitated greatly by the ethos of the 1960s. Described as both a "revolution of rising expectations" and a "revolution of equality" (Glazer, 1988; Sykes, 1992), the 1960s' demands for greater equality grew increasingly louder. The Great Society was to expand its social policy to complete democracy's work, to make America more open, more inclusive, and, thereby, to bring about greater equality between groups of people. In a commencement address at Howard University on June 4, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson proclaimed:

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[7] In discussing government's role in welfare, Dwight Lee (1989) comments: "The notion that compassion toward the poor requires favoring expansion of government transfer programs has achieved the status of revealed truth" (pp. 14-15). This observation, however, may extend well beyond the confines of welfare policy.

"We seek...not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result" (Lemann, 1995, p. 41).

To achieve equality as a result, at least two things had to do done: First, we had to liberate ourselves from a traditional American mind-set that acted to hinder and oppress certain groups of Americans from realizing opportunities; and second, as victims of injustice, certified oppressed groups had to be governmentally assisted with enabling treatment to assure a resulting equality -- a shift from individual rights to group quotas.

Writing about the Sixties' legacy, Manhattan Institute's Myron Magnet (1993) describes how the 1960s liberation efforts sought the political and economic freedom of the Have-Nots, the poor and the black. Out of this democratic impulse, Magnet contends, sprang: "the War on Poverty, welfare benefit increases, court-ordered school busing, more public housing projects, affirmative action. job-training programs, drug treatment programs, special education, The Other America, Archie Bunker, Roots, countless editorials and magazine articles and TV specials, black studies programs, multicultural curricula, new textbooks, all-black college dorms, sensitivity courses, minority set-asides, Martin Luther King Day, and the political correctness movement at colleges, to name only some of the...manifestations" (pp. 16-17).

The 1960s liberation movement also brought "the sexual revolution," opening the door to greater gender equality by challenging religious codes and bourgeois conventions that

confined sex to marriage and women to "accepted" fields of employment, serving also to make women dependent on men. With "the pill," the growing acceptance of promiscuous sex, and the increase of women in all areas of the marketplace, values and behaviors were transformed, re-shaping the American family structure and increasing a "mixed bag" of social consequences as women liberated themselves -- greater "no-fault" divorce, illegitimacy, venereal disease, and female-headed families across all levels of society as well as greater numbers of women in the work force, rising pay-parity with men, and the emergence of women at levels and in fields formerly rare for their representation. Today, "the principal tenets of sexual liberation or sexual liberalism -- the obsolescence of masculinity and femininity, of sex roles, and of heterosexual monogamy as the moral norm -- have diffused through the system and become part of America's conventional wisdom" (Gilder, 1992, pp. viii-ix).[8] By most standards, the women of today enjoy far greater equality with males than any previous era in America's history (Sommers, 1994), although still facing "glass ceiling problems in some sections of industry (Kilborn, 1995).

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[8] Rhona Mahoney (1995) believes that women will not be able to achieve real economic equality until as many men as women want to stay home with the children. It is babies, says Mahoney, who handicap women in the drive for equality. Because women choose and/or are forced to accept greater responsibility than men for child care, women experience lower salaries and lagging careers. She adivses women to consider "marrying down" to husbands who have less demanding careers and who, by negotiated agreement, will be willing to take equal or even major responsibility for child care.

Magnate also indicates how the liberation movement brought forth the "counterculture society." With it came further rejection of much traditional Americana: "The Establishment" (meaning persons exercising hegemony over others), the "regime of truth" (meaning rejection of belief in rational, objective truth), moral absolutes, the value of deferring immediate gratifications to achieve future goals, our "inherently unjust" capitalist economic system, and a "politically corrupt" government's involvement in Vietnam. Being part of counterculture society meant "letting it all hang out" in the egalitarian style of an authentic liberated soul, a person freed from convention and from guilt by being able to "drop-out" and/or to forge one's own identity by adopting an "alternative life style."

The special significance of the alternative life-style was noted by Allan Bloom (1987): "...In creating one's own 'life-style,' of which there is not just one but many possible, none (is) comparable to another. He who has a 'life-style' is in competition with, and hence inferior to, no one, and because he has one, he can command his own esteem and that of others" (p. 144). Hence, where moral absolutes, objective truth, competition and accompanying comparison do not exist, one is left in a state of greater equality by forfeit.

The yoking together of personal and political liberations to increase equality for all those perceived as not getting a fair shake had a curious effect. It made it acceptable for people to pursue self-interests without apology, and it promoted no-fault

policy-making, emphasizing rights and entitlements with few, if any, responsibilities. Writing "In Praise of the Counterculture," sympathetic New York Times' editors (1994) state:

> "The 60's spawned a new morality-based politics that emphasized the individual's responsibility to speak out against injustice and corruption...At its essence, the counterculture was about...values. It was a repudiation of the blind obedience and reflexive cynicism of politics as usual. It was about exposing hypocrisy, whether personal or political, and standing up to irrational authority" (p. E1)

The Limitations of Affirmative Action Enhancement

Many proponents of affirmative action, like Richard Young (1986), base their support on the view that blacks and other oppressed groups suffer by virtue of their membership in an American society that is inherently racist and sexist. Therefore, it is argued, when government acts in a neutral manner, it has a net effect of approving past discriminations. Because all "notions of merit" are "culturally determined," merit in America is therefore dominated by "cultural values which are clearly white, male, and Anglo in their biases." For government to reward such persons by accepting their notions of merit thus amounts to "ratifying" past discriminations, reasons Young (pp. 13-14).

In response to such assertions, W. R. Newell (1986) asks a question: If every standard of merit is to be treated as the equivalent of a "bias," what standard of justice may be appealed-to in overriding or modifying the current standards of merit?

Newell argues that if we can be indignant about discrimination, it must be because we have access to some standard of justice which forbids such practices. Further, if oppressed persons deserve a chance for meaningful opportunity, it must be because "opportunity contributes to a kind of life we recognize as a worthy choice." On the other hand, declares Newell, if the pressure for affirmative action "represents nothing but the self-interest" of the groups involved, "why should the entrenched majority yield its arbitrary biases in order to allow another, equally arbitrary set of biases to get ahead?" (p. 46). Indeed, why? Against such questions, says LeMann (1995), "is a very loud silence" (p. 40).

Typically, affirmative-action critics are reported (Meyerson, 1995; Lemann, 1995; Rosen,1994) to hold a number of beliefs upon which they base their criticisms, including:

-A belief that preferences are discriminatory in the sense that it is equally wrong for government to discriminate <u>for</u> certified groups as it is to discriminate <u>against</u> them;

-A belief that preferences violate the principles of American citizenship, undermining what unites us as Americans and balkinizing us by placing an emphasis on our differences;

-A belief that preference programs tend to foster dependency on government, doing more to create a permanent affirmative-action industry than in freeing recipients from dependence on government support;

-A belief that preference programs restrict freedom in the sense that highly regulated affirmative action policies work against creativity in organizations by denying employers ability to hire and fire whomever they wish because of sanctions against having a disparate impact on the certified preference-receiving groups;

-A belief that preference programs have been unsuccessful in addressing a major problem: integrating poor black males into mainstream America -- a problem believed linked to the increase of government intervention in welfare policy;

-A wide-spread belief that preference programs lead to a general lowering of standards and expectations to accommodate policy objectives.

Whether such beliefs are true or not, they appear to be gathering substantial support nation-wide, contributing toward a national change in mood as represented in the November, 1994, elections.

Some Conclusions about Equality Today

What might be concluded about the two visions of equality in America?

--In the traditional equality of opportunity vision, as long as each person has an equal access to compete openly, filling the 24-hour day with whatever efforts one elects to make, one should be prepared to abide by the results of that effort, win or lose. With equal access come the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in a pluralistic

society, rights protecting one against government and others.[9]

--In the affirmative action vision, as long as government can place its finger on the scale to assure certified groups an equal start, one should expect some form of assured equitable outcomes with efforts made toward muting comparative distinctions between groups. In this Rawlsian vision, justice is not about getting what one deserves, it is about "fairness" -- a sense of fairness holding that "the most talented must accept restrictions on how much they will benefit from their natural advantages in order to help the least advantaged" (Tivnan, 1995, p. 208). The justice of social institutions, accordingly, is measured by their effort to balance out the natural inequalities due to birth, talent, and fate. Advantages, thus, become "common assets" of the community in the service of the common good.

--And finally, there is a recognition that no matter what means employed, philosophically someone -- or some group -- will be found at unequal advantage. What makes a level playing field for some is not level for others. For most Americans, however, to be seen as equal in the eyes of each other as a condition of human worth would appear to be a reasonable expectation for

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[9] Jean Elshtain (1995) points out that rights as originally affirmed in our bill of Rights were to be understood as immunities, as protection from government intrusion -- rights that belonged to men and women in a context of familial and community networks, relationships that make up civil society. With the new vision of equality, this context of civic rights has been displaced by the idea of rights-as-entitlements of individuals freed of any and all ties of reciprocal obligation and mutual interdependence.

equality in America. While it too may be philosophically flawed (because it requires a judgment of worthiness to be made if "human condition" is not accepted as an article of faith), it has the virtue of being simple and easily grasped: either you see others to be of equal worth or you do not. Whichever way you perceive others begs the question: Why? -- a question that becomes uncomfortably complex as one moves from an abstract principle to a concrete application (for example, how equal in the eyes of each other do we perceive, say, Jeffrey Dahmer or Mother Teresa? Should it matter?).

Equality, Government Intervention, and the Supreme Court

With the recent series of Supreme Court decisions and cases re-examining and re-defining the nature of equality in America (and with it, government's role in this matter), one can anticipate an avalanche of closely-argued briefs and careful studies. Wrapped in these arguments will be the question: Has American society yet reached the condition asserted by Justice Bradley in the Civil Rights Cases of 1883? He asserted that:

> "When a man has emerged from slavery, and by the aid of beneficient legislation has shaken off the inseparable concomitants of that state, there must be some stage in the progress of his elevation when he takes the rank of a mere citizen and ceases to be the special favorite of the laws, when his rights as a citizen, or a man are to be protected in the ordinary modes by which other men's rights are protected" (Civil Rights Cases 109 U.S. 3, 24 [1883]).

Whether we as a society have yet reached such a point, or even are close to reaching one, remains to be seen. States Andrew Hacker (1995):

> "By now, there is general agreement that...(affirmative-action) programs have largely benefited men and women who were already in -- or on their way to -- the middle class and who had prospects of steady careers. Preferential hiring programs did not expand black employment in the aggregate, and only in a few cases did they provide opportunities for people at the bottom" (p. B2).

It would seem that, like Aristotle's concept of justice, our concept of equality in today's America requires us "to treat equals equally and unequals unequally." Our problem is that we have difficulty agreeing: on whom we must treat equally and whom unequally; on when, where, and how this treatment should take place; and by whom the treating shall be done. But we do know why we strive for equality: to be equal in the eyes of each other.

In the meanwhile, for both those holding traditional and new visions of equality, our educational system remains THE major thoroughfare for equality's pursuit in America -- "Democracy is less the enabler of education than education is the enabler of democracy" (Barber, 1992, 14).

AMERICAN EDUCATION IN THE EQUALITY STRUGGLES

The history of the common school in America -- from its formulation in the 1830s and 1840s (under Horace Mann's persuasion of Americans to accept his vision and to pay for it[10]) to the present -- has been one of increasing access. That is, a history appealing to the use of legal and other means to attack barriers to mainstream society through its educational entrance, barriers that block both individuals and specific groups from full participation, barriers that prevent certain peoples from experiencing an equal start in their quest for opportunity and the American Dream. Suppporting this thrust for increased access is the belief that through education, a broadened path to social, political, and economic forms of access await and a better world will result.

For those holding the affirmative-action vision, "better" means a world more diverse, more equitable, and more "just" in the sense that discrimination will wither away and a condition of tolerance and fairness will prevail. For equal opportunists, the vision of "better" would seem to coincide with James Truslow Adams (1931) notion of achieving the American Dream: "a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous

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[10] Jonathan Messerli's Horace Mann (1972) is widely regarded as the standard biography on Mann's life and influence. For an especially perceptive treatment of Mann's impact on today's educational battles, see Christopher Lasch's The Revolt of the Elites (1995), Chapter 8.

circumstances of birth or position" (p.8).

If one merely marked this history of expanding educational access over, say, the recent course of one's own career in education since World War II, an impressive effort might be noted nationally. For example: (1) stronger compulsory attendance laws making it mandatory for all children of designated school-age to attend schools free from elementary into secondary levels of education; (2) creation of a vast state-subsidized college and university system which, while rarely totally free, usually guarantees admission somewhere to any high school graduate; (3) removal of racial and ethnic barriers to education with the 1954 Supreme Court ruling that separate public schools could not be considered "equal"; (4) the 1965 acts to increase compensatory "equal start" education for children from deprived circumstances; and (5) the widening of educational opportunities for handicapped children and those whose native language is not English.

Washington Comes to the Local Schoolhouse

Clearly, the process of expanding both educational access and equity was greatly facilitated by an activist federal government during this period. Starting with the Supreme Court's 1954 decree in Brown v. Board of Education, the separation of races in public education was ended. An era of mandated court rulings affecting education began. A series of court-ordered busing and racial integration mandates increased throughout the country in the 1970s, often precipitating "white-flight" from many of the highly integrated school districts, particularly in

urban areas.

Rulings ending racial-divisions in education were also legislatively extended to gender-divisions. For example, in passing the Education Amendments of 1972, Congress prohibited schools from discriminating against female students and faculty. In the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act opened greater access to disabled students who, where possible, were to be "mainstreamed." This act was further extended in 1990's Individual's with Diabilities Education Act, ushering-in the concept of "inclusion."[11] Similarly, the 1974 Lau v. Nichols decision by the Supreme Court that non-English-speaking students were to be given special services to remove barriers to the access of equal educational opportunity. And again, in court rulings like the 1975 Wood v. Strickland that went even beyond the earlier 1960s court rulings for "due-process" and "equal protection" rights in disciplinary matters, giving school children the rights to receive written notice of the charges against them, to have a lawyer present, to

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[11] Martha McCarthy (1994) offers the following distinctions: "Inclusion differs from mainstreaming in that the latter term usually refers to integrating children with disabilities and nonhandicapped children for only a portion of the day, which may be during nonacademic times. In a fully inclusive model, students with disabilities, no matter how severe, are taught in the regular classroom of their home school with their age and grade peers for the full day with support services provided within that classroom. In short, inclusion means bringing support services to the child rather than moving the child to a segregated setting to receive special services" (emphasis added, p. 1).

cross-examine witnesses, to refuse to answer incriminating questions, and to appeal decisions -- the Wood v. Strickland ruling now extended to students the right to sue school authorities for damages in their quest for educational equity, a further "levelling of the playing field."

Combined with the many tax and school funding litigations toward the transference of funds from wealthier school districts to poorer ones, these federal activities produced at least five changes in the operation of the American public schools: (1) mountains of new rules and regulations now made the public schools even more bureacratic in structure by necessity;[12] (2) power to control educational policy-making at the local level was both diminished and shifted to state and federal agencies (which passed back more regulations and, often unfunded, mandates to local districts in return); (3) it gave the schools a "litigious climate" often more commanding of attention than the school's "learning climate;" (4) with the added requirements to comply with federal and state mandated services, the costs of local

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[12] This phenomenon affects universities as well. Complains Brown University's President, Vartan Gregorian (1995): "Regulations -- 7,000 individual items governing financial aid are from Title IV alone -- have become a major administrative burden. That is only one Title. I will not mention other federal titles nor myriad state and local regulations. Whether intended or not, the impact of thousands of regulations is to homogenize and bureaucratize our institutions and to dampen the creative spirit of our universities. Worse, many regulations command compliance but do not provide the means, further compromising an institution's already limited financial resources and academic priorities" (. 3).

public education increased dramatically across the nation;[13] and, (5) in their overall thrust, the new policies made the broadening of educational equity a greater priority than education's quality.

Although many obstacles remain in achieving universal educational access to the satisfaction of all Americans, it has been a continuing mission for American education. Discussing American education the last three decades, Chester Finn (1991) notes:

> "Its political foundation comprised the prevailing 'liberal consensus' that ruled the education profession, the powerful moral imperative of the civil rights movement, the inherent disposition toward equality of an increasingly activist federal judiciary, a sense of the limitlessness of the 'Great Society' to be created by an energized federal government, sustained economic prosperity...and the confidence that no meaningful distinction existed between more and better education"(p.7).

The Educational Establishment as an Openly Partisan Interest Group

Over this same period and accompanying the thrust for

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[13] For example, in a recent report (Myers, 1994) on educational spending per pupil in the New York City Public Schools, it was stated that "while the city schools spend $7,918 for each of 1,016,728 schoolchildren, the average dropped to $4, 287 for the majority of students not enrolled in special education or bilingual programs. Of that amount, only $2,308 was spent on teaching" (p. B1) The per-pupil cost of full-time special education pupils was given as $23,598 (p. B7).

increased educational access has also been a sharpening of ideological differences between equality's two visions, changing American education further in the process (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995; Ravitch, 1983; Toch, 1991). As pressures within the professional educational community grew over this period (abetted by court decisions, specific legislation, and agency regulations)[14], the public schools' professionals and their educational programs moved decidedly toward the affirmative action vision -- that is, toward educational policies emphasizing equity of educational outcomes between groups of students to promote "social justice" rather than toward more traditional policies calling for the development of each child to his or her fullest potential or individual striving for excellence. "Social justice," suggests H-J Katt (1995), is defined in terms of "equity," "inclusiveness," and "quotas," and in the schools in terms of "success for every student," but, above all, it is defined in terms of how students feel about themselves, feel about their teachers, feel about the curriculum, and how comfortable they feel in the classroom" (p. 52)

Led by the National Education Association (NEA), the professional education community -- the "Educational

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[14] A simple example (one of many) of how such pressures are generated in subtle ways is seen in a 1977 ruling by a federal judge requiring Ann Arbor, Michigan, reading teachers to take special training in "black English" because black students were being denied equity in their education by insensitive teachers who spoke "an identifiable dialect of the English language" -- that is, the teachers spoke standard English (Honig,1985, p. 102).

Establishment"[15] -- embraced the affirmative-action form of equality and promoted it as part of its agenda, moving from its historically liberal-but-(ostensibly)-neutral stance on educational and other policy matters to more openly partisan stances. "The truth is that when the children of the sixties," explains Roger Kimball (1991), received their teaching positions and tenure "they did not abandon the dream of radical cultural transformation; they set out to implement it" (p. 166).

Thus one finds the NEA's Representative Assembly going on record to <u>support</u> such disparate things as teacher strikes; the public schools' distribution of condoms; a nuclear freeze; gay rights; the Equal Rights Amendment; statehood for the District of Columbia; and -- a sharp break from its historic neutrality -- the candidacy for President of Jimmy Carter, Walter Mondale, Michael Dukakis, and Bill Clinton. At the same time, they voted to <u>oppose</u>: merit pay for teachers; parental choice; voluntary prayer; state takeovers of "educationally bankrupt" school districts; home schooling; English as the official language; testing for drugs, alcohol and AIDS; nuclear power plants; aid to the Nicaraguan resistance; the nomination of Robert Bork to the

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[15] As used here, the term, "Educational Establishment," is similar to Chester Finn's (1980) usage of "liberal consensus," meaning the membership of groups like the Ford and Carnegie foundations; the elite graduate schools of education (Harvard, Stanford, Columbia,etc.); the two major teacher unions (the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers) and other national education associations; civil rights organizations; think-tanks such as Brookings Institution and the Aspen Institute; a small number of key Democratic congressmen; and the political appointees in the education agencies of the federal executive branch.

Supreme Court; and Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush for president (Bennett, 1992; Haar, Lieberman & Troy, 1994). "Of the 4,928 delegates to the 1992 Democratic national convention, 512 were NEA or AFT members -- the largest interest group contingent among the delegates." reports Myron Lieberman (1993, p. 312).

Such actions by its largest component assist in establishing the professional educational community as a partisan political group. While there have been gains from this partisan support (e.g., the elevation of education to the President's Cabinet at the "Secretary of Education" level[16]), there are also losses, particularly in the public's diminished perception of educators as nonpartisan objective professionals.

The Growth of Education's Ideological Split on Equality

Under the banner of change and social transformation, the public schools moved through the late 1960s and 1970s toward an acceptance of the Rawlsian sense of justice, attempting to balance out the natural inequalities of student groups due to birth, talent, and circumstance under the aegis of "fairnes" and equity. To do so, many school districts eliminated graduation requirements, de-emphasized traditional academic subjects,

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[16] Bennett (1992) writes that "the assumption had been that the Department of Education would be a wholly owned subsidiary of the education establishment and the special-interest organizations. The people who had the most to do with creating the department had been assured that it would work hand-in-glove with the education powers that be. In particular, they believed the Secretary of Education would be their spokesman, their representative, their creation" (p. 48).

introduced student-designed and student-taught courses, de-emphasized or eliminated letter grades, grouped children for instruction randomly instead of by age or ability, and granted academic credit for off-campus courses, community involvement, and other "alternative-style" nontraditional work (Silberman, 1973; Ravitch, 1983; Toch, 1991). At the same time, "open enrollment" policies were adopted at many public colleges and universities, thereby further expanding students' access to education, even if critics complained about the slackening of academic standards necessary to ensure the accommodation of the "new population" of students (D'Souza, 1991; Jones, 1995; Sykes, 1990)[17]. Using federal legislation to define its sense of racial, sexual, cultural, language, physical and economic aspects of education, the educational egalitarians worked toward equalizing everyone to the lowest common denominator -- that is, to reduce the consequences of individual differences while muting measures of educational achievement, moral absolutes, and traditional standards. With court decisions weakening the influence of Judeo-

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[17] Bruno Manno (1994) writes: "(T)wo groups of students graduated from American high schools and go on to college -- those who know and can do college work and those who can't...This two-track system we've created is more extensive than most realize.

Here are some facts:

--Seventy-five percent of colleges offer remedial courses in reading, writing and math, and, on average, give two different courses in a remedial subject.

--Twenty-three percent of colleges award degree credit for remedial courses.

--Thirty percent of entering freshmen -- 55 percent at minority colleges -- enroll in at least one remedial course" (p. 1).

Christian morality[18], secular humanism (as part of the liberation movements) was more militantly advanced in the public schools, bringing "new rules concerning sex (premarital sex, homosexuality, abortion, pornography), gender (feminism), signs of laxity toward communism, the decline of Biblical morality, the acceptance of the theory of evolution, and the diminution of religion in public life" (Manatt, 1995, p. 15).

In turn, the revolutionary nature of these policies turned the public schools of many communities into a more openly partisan battleground -- on one side stands the liberal Democratic party with the support of the Educational Establishment and left-wing groups; on the other, stands conservative Republicans and their right-wing allies, the "religious right," and many American parents. With the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan as President, Terrell Bell, a lifelong public educator, was appointed Secretary of Education. Concerned that education's "obsession" with equality had caused it to "shrug aside" its commitment to academic achievement, Bell moved "to shift the focus of national education policy from equity to

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[18] While problems of accommodation between religious communities and the public schools have existed as long as we have had public schools, the modern-era battles are often attributed to Madalyn Murray O'Hair's crusade to remove God, the Bible, and prayer from the public schools in 1962 (Americans United, 1993). Two Supreme Court "religious activities" rulings, Engle v. Vitale and the Schempp case, struck down mandatory prayer and devotional Bible reading in the public schools. In turn, the exodus of God from the public schools got extended to His exodus from "the public square," thereby ushering in what Stephen Carter (1993) calls, "the culture of disbelief" and hyper secular humanism.

excellence" (Toch, 1991, p. 51). The April 26, 1983, release of A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform moved a new reform agenda forward. The report's indictment of the nation's schools equity policies was harsh:

> "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people...If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose upon America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war" (p. 5).

Written during a peroid of American financial and economic decline, the National Commission on Excellence in Education's report drew a picture of our economy as failing "because" our educational system was failing, suggesting that for America to succeed economically, our educational system had to succeed. This effort meant more homework, tougher graduation requirements, a basic high school curriculum of academic subjects (science, language arts, foreign language, and math), greater teacher preparation and higher salaries (including merit pay), and a longer school year.[19]

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[19] Apparently many of these recommendations have had some success. The National Center for Educational Statistics reports in "High School Students Ten Years after 'A Nation at Risk'," that more students took and completed more academic courses and met more rigorous graduation requirements in 1992 than they did in 1982. For example, in 1982, only 48% of graduating seniors had taken geometry, but by 1992, that number rose to 70% (with calculus going from 4% to 10%; biology, chemistry and physics, from 10% to 22%). By 1990, the average math score for 17-year-olds had also gained 9 points, the equivalent of a year's growth, and school dropout rates declined about 5%. Setting higher

The report touched many traditional American themes: it referred to the "intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of our people" (p. 7), "the value of individual freedom" (p. 7), and showed disdain for "waste" -- "The public has no patience with undemanding and superfluous school offerings" (p. 17). But, on the critical matter of confronting equality, the report backed away and, instead, recommended both quality and equality: "The twin goals of equity and high quality schooling have profound and practical meanings and...we cannot permit one to yield to the other" (p. 22). Rhetoric notwithstanding, concludes Philip Cusick (1992), "an underlying agenda of the commission was to increase academic requirements and correspondingly to decrease the emphasis on equity that had dominated educatonal discourse since the mid-1960s" (pp. 143-144).

Bell's successor as Secretary of Education was William Bennett (1992), a more confrontational type who forcefully used the "bully pulpit" of the Secretary's office more aggressively.[20] To Bennett, the equity notions as applied to the schools meant that the public schools were being "systematically and culturally deconstructed," leaving us unable to answer basic institutional

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standards appears to work -- students rise to meet them (Shanker, 1995).

[20] "I entered the Cabinet," says Bennett (1992), "believing that if the education reform movement was to succeed, it had to rest on the conviction that the public schools belong to the public, not the experts, not social scientists, not professionals, not an educational establishment, not the elite....I think they expected a Secretary who would mainly travel the commencement circuit and not ruffle any feathers, a kind of Alistair Cooke-as-Education Secretary" (pp. 46-47).

questions: "Who are we? Why are we here? And where are we going?" (p. 51). The former U.S. Secretary of Education contrasted what the American people were telling him with what the Educational Establishment was saying. Two tasks American people consistently placed before him at the top of their list were: first, to teach our children how to speak, write, read, think and count correctly; and second, to help them develop standards of right and wrong that will guide them through life.[21] Meanwhile, the Educational Establishment was telling him: "to make America a more 'just' society; to help students 'cope' with life; to increase 'global awareness'; and (to) change the shape and focus of America" (p. 51).

Particularly annoying to Bennett and persons more attuned to the traditional vision of education was the increased use of subjectivism and relativism by egalitarians attempting to mute differences between groups in the name of greater equity.[22]

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[21] Tending to confirm Bennett's characterization of contrasts is the Public Agenda Foundation's survey report, "First Things First: What Americans Expect From the Public Schools" (1994), of 1,100 Americans. The report suggests that, lopsidely, American parents want orderly, safe schools that emphasize reading, writing, and math, and expect students to be individually accountable for what they learn. Eighty-eight percent recommend not allowing graduation from high school until a student can demonstrate that he or she can write and speak English well. Only a third of parents support mixed-ability or heterogeneous grouping. "I think," says Deborah Wadsworth, the Foundation's executive director, "that what we have picked up is this enormous disconnect between the leadership and the public" (Walsh, 1994, p. 6).

[22] For nearly two decades, Bennett declared in a 1985 speech, "the teaching of social studies in our schools has been dominated by cultural relativism," the belief that "all cultures and traditions are equally valid, that there are no real criteria

Programs like "values clarification" to provide teachers in the early 1970s with techniques to help students identify feelings and beliefs without imposing "external values" (e.g., moral absolutes) on them epitomized for traditionalists the moral anathema of ethical relativism -- an ideology holding, says Sidney Simon (the concept's leading advocate), that "none of us has the 'right' set of values to pass on to other people's children" (Honig, 1985, p. 95). Responded Bill Honig (1985), California's outside-the-Establishment Superintendent of Public Instruction:

> "While pretending to Olympian detachment in its neutrality on moral issues, values clarification actually affirms the shallowest kind of ethical relativism. It tells students that on matters of profound moral significance, their opinion -- no matter how ill-informed, far-fetched, or speciously reasoned -- is all that counts. Ethics and morals are reduced to matters of personal taste....(a) blithe invitation to moral anarchy" (p. 97).

The railing of conservatives against the use of subjectivism and relativism by egalitarians received a boost in the publication of two nationally best-selling books critical of liberal efforts. E. D. Hirsch's Cultural Literacy (1988) argued against education's emphasis on the process of education at the expense of its substance, its content -- with how students learn

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for good and bad, right and wrong, noble and base" (Toch, 1991, p. 68).

rather than with what students learn. The reason for this shift, contends Hirsch, is the cultural egalitarian belief that any content providing reading, writing, and thinking skills -- while keeping educators "scrupulously neutral" on the matter of content -- is suitable "on the grounds that such variety can accommodate the different interests and abilities of different students" (p. 12). To Hirsch, such thinking applied in the public schools represents an abdication of the schools' historic mission to provide pupils a sense of a common American culture. Cultural Literacy thus represented Hirsch's attempt to rectify this shortcoming by providing today's schools with a list of 5,000 pieces of "cultural knowledge" with which he thinks any reasonably literate American should have some familiarity -- a claim branding him as "an elitist" (English, 1992).[23]

The other publication was the late Allan Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind (1987), a book describing the growing diminution among today's college students of both cultural knowledge and the intellectual traditions for understanding it. In an effort to accommodate the egalitarian vision of equity, suggested Bloom, there has been an over-reliance on tolerance-as-openness. In application, this openness actually yields "indifference" in the students, an inability of them to distinguish good from bad in their desire to be uncritically

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[23] English (1992) asks: "Whose 'culture' is being reflected here (in Cultural Literacy)? Whose lives are being discussed, modeled, and made the 'power base' for certification and advancement? And by 'freezing these relationships, whose ends are being advanced?" (p. 88).

> "Its shortcomings notwithstanding, the equity movement permanently altered the moral landscape in American education, establishing the widest possible participation in the educational mainstream as a national priority. In this changed environment,...(traditionalists') calls for educational excellence in the 1980s implied much more than did similar exhortations in earlier eras: for the first time, the full range of students served by the nation's schools were included in the excellence equation" (p. 71).

Thus, one might suppose that with this felicitous circumstance of linking equity with excellence to permit a sort of ultimate form of equality -- "an aristocracy of everyone" (Barber, 1992) -- that all would be "right-with-America." Unfortunately, as a new millenium approaches, this happy resolution does not appear to be working as well as persons of goodwill would like. Like reports from a battlefront, the daily news carries stories and tales echoing the on-going conflict between equality's two visions -- a principal whose notion of equality and fairness means passing 17 failed seniors so they can graduate with their peers (Gonzalez, 1995); a report on the narrowing of educational expenditures between rich and poor school districts (Gray, 1994); a study on achieving "diversity" in academe (Russell, 1994); and so on. The NEA tells its 2.2 million members that they face (for the first time since playing partisan politics) a hostile Congress and disenchanted public, that they must reach out for public support or risk becoming "the

tolerant, open, and, in current parlance, "politically correct." Accordingly, Western culture and its traditions become increasingly irrelevant to them and, thereby, we are weakened as a nation -- a conclusion hailed as "antidemocratic" by his many liberal critics.[24]

The release of A Nation at Risk spawned over 300 subsequent reform commissions and reports as well as two more "Education Presidents," launching a continuing educational reform effort on the national scene. The Bush administration and its America 2000 (1991) followed, in turn to be followed by the Clinton administration's "Goals 2000: The Educate America Act," embodied best in the U.S. Department of Education's publication, High Standards for All Students (1994). All of these reforms carry within them implications for helping American children to get a more equal start as well as to realize their potentials. In each case, Washington has placed its finger on the scale of equality in slightly different places, believing that assistance is being rendered for groups of Americans to be equal in the eyes of each other.

While more might be said about American education in the equality struggles of the last thirty years, some observations may be in order at this point. Particularly insightful are the comments of Tom Toch (1991):

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[24] Typical of such critics is Benjamin Barber (1992), who writes: "Bloom has conceived what must be regarded as one of the most profoundly antidemocratic books ever written for a democratic audience, certainly a book as hostile to egalitarianism as any..." (p. 153).

schools of last resort" as "more and more parents...withdraw into their own ethnic, religious, or elite islands, if the corporate take-over or voucher proponents have their way" ("Teachers warned...," 1995, p. 9). Thus, the context for Americans to be equal in the eyes of each other is yet to be realized. Some still argue for a more equal start; others for more equal outcomes; and yet others who want "fairness" to mean a free and open competition of individuals to do their best, and who dismiss the notion of government with its finger on the scale to favor some and handicap others.[25] So, where do we go from here?

FACING UP TO AMERICA'S EQUALITY CONFLICT; SOME REFLECTIONS

In considering education's role in America's equality struggles, let us re-consider some earlier thoughts. More specifically, under the equal opportunity vision offered by Fishkin (1988), three conditions are to be observed in the traditional American formulation of this vision:

-That merit should determine rewards;

-That prospects for achieving merit or other rewards should

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[25] William Henry (1994) comments: "We have foolishly embraced the unexamined notions that everyone is pretty much alike (and worse, should be), that self-fulfillment is more important than objective achievement, that the common man is always right, that he needs no interpreters or intermediaries to guide his thinking, that a good and just society should be far more concerned with succoring its losers than with honoring and encouraging its winners to achieve more and thereby benefit everyone" (. 12).

not be predictable on the basis of one's race, sex, religion, ethnic identification, or family background; and

-That family autonomy should not be intruded-upon by the government.

Given such conditions (which, recall, appear philosophically impossible to honor) -- equal treatment and a "fair shake" -- one ought to be able to strive toward self-fulfillment and the American Dream. Applied to education, such a vision looks to consider individual differences (rather than group differences) and acts to encourage each student to do his or her best academically. It includes the belief that both individual and national excellence can be achieved only if we reward rather than punish achievement and success.

Less attractively, as such striving invites competition for grades and other rewards, it engenders a consciousness of academic status with some being perceived as "better-than" others, and it creates a sense of "winners-and-losers."

Combined with other changes taking place on the American scene, our efforts to promote equality have confronted three issues which are further complicating our efforts to be equal in the eyes of each other. Each issue is a "gone-awry" outgrowth of Fishkin's three conditions -- merit, equal prospects, and autonomy of the home. Thus, they are labelled: the meritocracy issue, the "equal prospects" issue, and the school-home issue.

The Cognitive Elite and the Meritocracy Issue

What happens when merit unabashedly seeks rewards? A quick

answer is: Unbridled, the traditional equality of educational opportunity vision of open competition leads, irrevocably, to meritocracy. True, the American version of meritocracy tends to be obscured by the egalitarian pressue to promote the belief that anyone can (and should) be brought up to college level. In the rhetoric promoting mass higher education (for seemingly everyone), the colleges appear to have adjusted accordingly and come down to everyone's level as the high number of current remedial courses attest. Nevertheless, an historical shift toward meritocracy is underway in America.

One of the most compelling portions of Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's controversial book, The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life (1994),[26] is its depiction of how efficiently American education has pursued merit relatively unabashedly and its effects on our society. Herrnstein and Murray argue compellingly that there has been a vast but nearly invisible migration of "the cognitive elite" (i.e., persons in the top percentiles of cognitive ability) in

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[26] Since its publication in the fall of 1994, The Bell Curve has been the subject of literally hundreds of newspaper editorials, journal articles, and even some books. The problem? Herrnstein and Murray claim three "truths": (1) that all races are represented across the range of intelligence, from lowest to highest; (2) that American blacks and whites have different mean scores on mental tests of about one standard deviation (about 15 IQ points); and (3) that such tests are generally as predictive of academic and job performance for blacks as for other ethnic groups. The problem is, says one critic of Herrnstein and Murray, "they destroy hope." My selection for the most interesting critique is the selection of short, insightful essays found in: "The Bell Curve: A Symposium," National Review (1994, December 4). Charles Murray replies to many of the critics in: "The Bell Curve and Its Critics," Commentary (1995, May).

this country over the second half of this century, reshaping our society in the process. The cognitive elite are not to be confused with the larger 63% of all American high school graduates who today go on to some form of further education (with 30% ultimately receiving a four-year baccalaureate degree) -- the cognitive elite more closely resemble the top of the 10% to 15% of the restrictive British, French and Japanese universities. While most persons in our top 5 or 10 percent of distributed intelligence were not college educated at the start of this century and were scattered rather randomly across all walks of life, by the end of the 20th century, this previously unstratified group of high cognitive ability in our society has become concentrated, forming a new class in our society, the cognitive elite. That is, by the 1960s, our educational system had begun an enormous effort to cull-out every academically talented child -- from the inner-city to the suburbs to the rural counties -- and urge them to attend college. With increasing efficiency, an effective system has evolved: the brighter the child, the more likely the channelling into our top colleges and professional schools, and, thence, into those occupations requiring high intelligence -- that is, those commanding the greatest economic, social, and political rewards.[27] They write:

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[27] The United States, of course, is not alone in such a sorting system. The Japanese, for example, have their famous "examination hell" in the teen years, "a time of extraordinary pressure when a few failed exams can peg a student as a prospective lathe worker instead of a corporate executive" (Kristof, 1995, p. A6). A factor that distinguishes Japanese culture from American culture is that Japanese students also have

"Membership in this new class, the cognitive elite, is gained by high IQ; neither social background, nor ethnicity, nor lack of money will bar the way. But once in the club, usually by age eighteen, members begin to share much else as well. Among other things, they will come to run much of the country's business" (p. 510).

This migration of the cognitive elite fulfills much of the American Dream of equal opportunity (i.e., that each person should be able to go as far as talent and hard work -- merit -- will take him or her), but there are other considerations as well. For example, on one hand, this recruited pool of highly talented persons has made possible America's vast 20th century technological expansion -- the quality of life for everyone has been enriched. On the other, it has increasingly come to mean a population of Americans who are becoming ever-more isolated from the rest of society. In many ways distinct from the general public, the cognitive elite go to the same kinds of schools, marry others from those schools (and later send their children to them too), live in similar neighborhoods, go to the same kinds of theaters and restaurants, read the same sorts of newpapers and magazines, watch the same TV shows, and so on. "As their common ground with the rest of society decreases, their coalescence as a

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a high level of intact families featuring "education mamas," housewives "whose mission in life is to wheedle and bully their children to spend every moment studying" (p. A6),and, often, close-knit peer support groups also concerned about academic progress. While teenage suicide is a growing problem in America (behind New Zealand as the world-leader of teen suicide), the suicide rate for Japanese teens is well below our own.

new class increases" (p. 513).

The Bell Curve goes on to depict how the cognitive elite has been merging with affluent society, producing an increasingly caste-like society. As a sort of ruling caste, the cognitive elite has come into being, symbolized by the "gated community" with its own security forces, isolating itself from the general society even while it largely controls it. On the other hand, there is the rest of the country, including many graduates of our less rigorous institutions and programs, economically-plateaued[28] in repetitive white- and pink-collar jobs that have replaced the bulk of work formerly done by the blue-collar factory worker (at least now no heavy lifting is required). Sadly, this population is increasingly symbolized by a deteriorating quality of life,[29] especially for people at the bottom end of the cognitive ability scale. Of this apocalyptic vision, Herrnstein and Murray write:

> "Unchecked, these trends will lead the U.S. toward something resembling a caste society, with the underclass mired ever more firmly at the bottom and the cognitive elite ever more firmly anchored at the top, restructuring the rules of society so that it becomes harder and harder for them to

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[28] Louis Uchitelle (1994), writing about "The Rise of the Losing Class," reports: "A variety of statistics show that the incomes of college-educated people have been failing in recent years to keep pace with inflation. Men in the early 50's with four years of college, for example, have been stuck 10 years at the same income, adjusted for inflation" (p. E5).

[29] Donald McCloskey (1994-95) takes exception to the general view that America is in decline, arguing that the world is converging and that we are misinterpreting "the facts."

lose. Among other casualties of this process would be American civil society as we have known it" (p. 509).

If Herrnstein and Murray and their highly documented argument of this social transition were alone, it might be tempting to dismiss their concerns. But they are not alone.[30] From converging opinion, a picture of demographic change emerges:

-that the schools have a growing influence (often at the expense of the family) as life's arbiter in the determination of a child's future through its system of sorting, a system that sends "the best and the brightest" to commensurate colleges, the others to "the other" colleges, and the non-college-bound to whatever is available;

-that this seemingly democratic system of sorting by merit carries less democratically attractive features with it -- a growing segregation of society by cognitive ability, contempt for manual labor (even by those most likely to earn

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[30] For example, Robert Reich's (1992) "symbolic analysts" are identical in description to the cognitive elite and so is Alvin Gouldner"s "culture of critical discourse." Mickey Kaus (1992) voices concern for democracy by what he sees as the routine acceptance of professionals as "a class apart" in our society. He sees a decay of public institutions where citizens no longer meet and mingle as equals. Kaus also worries about the penchant of this professional class with its "smug contempt for the demographically inferior " to be obsessed with control and with building parallel or "alternative" institutions which that it unnecessary to confront the rest of society, particularly its underclass. And Christopher Lasch (1995) extends these re-shaping-of-America-by-meritocracy themes by tracing the selective elevation of an elite that is increasingly mobile and global in its outlook, increasingly unaccepting of limits or ties to nations and places, and increasingly isolated in their networks and enclaves, becoming disengaged -- fleeing? --from the rest of society.

a living from it), deteriorating schooling for those children not part of the cognitive elite, and the loosening of ties to a common culture;

-that because merit has won the cognitive elite "their place" (often in the sense of Jefferson's "natural aristocracy"), there is a lessened sense of obligation to predecessors or to their communities;[31]

-that the cognitive elite's favored way of retaining position is by recruiting the best children of the lower classes while they are still young, thereby stripping the lower classes of their potential leadership;

-that the cognitive elite does not appear to follow the "noblesse oblige" inclinations of earlier "advantaged" American generations, but rather inclines toward the Latin American model of keeping the gated-mansion on the hill safe from the menace of the slums below by whatever means necessary;[32]

-that the problems caused by the cognitive stratification of

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[31] Kenichi Ohmae (1995) makes a case for the ending of the nation state as we know it, moving toward an emerging network of regional economies. National loyalty does not appear to be a high priority among Ohmae's cognitive elite who appear as "regional globalists" more interested in goods and services than national borders.

[32] D. Martin (1988) asks: "But what happens if the American Dream loses its potency and the middle class declines in influence and numbers? Could the U.S. ever become the South Africa of North America, our increasingly rich and increasingly small ruling class (i.e., the cognitive elite) holding sway over a populace that is largely poor, nonwhite, and dissatisfied?" (emphasis added, p. 22).

an increasing underclass promise to become more socially menacing as the labor market available to them becomes more difficult for the underclass to cope-with; and

-that, increasingly, a permanent custodial state will be employed as the means to smooth-out life for the underclass.

Describing the emerging custodial state, Herrnstein and Murray comment:

> "(W)e have in mind a high-tech and more lavish version of the Indian reservation for some substantial minority of the nation's population, while the rest of America tries to go about its business...It is difficut to imagine the United States preserving its heritage of individualism, equal rights before the law, free people running their own lives, once it is accepted that a significant part of the population must be made permanent wards of the state" (p.526).

Perhaps even more chilling to those Americans who would be equal in the eyes of each other is the observation of Herrnstein and Murray that they "are not even really projecting but reporting...(making) nothing more than the distinction between tacit and implicit" (p. 526). With this observation, they leave us with a question: How can a society in which a cognitve elite dominates and in which below-average cognitive ability is increasingly a handicap be a society that makes good on the fundamental promise of the American tradition: the equal opportunity for everyone, not just the lucky ones, to live a

satisfying life?

The "Equal Prospects" Issue

It can be argued that the affirmative-action egalitarians have acted precisely to answer this question by promoting the "equal prospects" condition. In part, as a reaction against any trend that produces an elite (unless it be a "proletarian eltie") and, in part, as a fulfillment of the social transformation dreams of the 1960s, egalitarians have followed two strategies to promote equal prospects while muting individual pursuits of excellence and the consequences of unbridled meritocracy -- they have sought ways to restrict or marginalize the performances of those deemed "advantaged" while, at the same time, they have sought other ways to "raise-up," "make relevant," and/or "empower" those deemed "disadvantaged." Such means are thus meant to enhance equal prospects for the disadvantaged. Often these strategies are justified on the basis of overcoming "institutional" racism or sexism, "institutional" meaning policies that appear neutral on their face, but nevertheless work to the disadvantage of the "disadvantaged."

For example, the practice of "tracking" in secondary school programs might serve as an illustration of a traditional policy used to facilitate the American Dream, but also one often accused of promoting "institutional racism." Tracking involves assigning students to courses or programs on the basis of their abilities and career interests. Typically, one might expect to find four "career tracks" available to a secondary student: the academic

(college-bound), the vocational (trade-bound), "general" (for the undecided), the commercial (office-worker-bound). On the surface, the student appears free to select whichever track he or she desires. It is seldom, however, a decision reached in a vacuum. There is one's past academic performance as well as the results of standardized tests to consider. Next, the "professional opinion" of the school counselor needs to be consulted, often with parental wishes and peer plans considered as well. The problem comes, says Lieberman (1993), when two students of equal ability elect different tracks.[33] If one elects the college-bound track, there follows an understanding that more academic work will be expected than for the other student who elected, say, the general track -- one student may subsequently be headed toward becoming an executive; the other, toward being unemployable. The expectation of low performance yields low performance. And when

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[33] Jencks (1988) makes a similar argument: "The question of when opportunities are 'the same' is equally fraught with potential controversy. Conservatives usually argue that two people have the same choices when the objective costs and benefits of each option are the same. If Johnny and Mary can attend the same colleges at the same prices, if their parents are equally prepared to underwrite the costs, and if they can expect to reap the same benefits from attending these colleges, then they confront the same range of choices. Liberals and radicals habitually take account of subjective costs and benefits as well. If Johnny has grown up in a household where studying is a low priority activity, for example, while Mary has grown up in a household where it is a religious obligation, Johnny will usually find the subjective cost of doing schoolwork higher than Mary finds it. All else being equal, Johnny will therefore choose a less academically demanding college than Mary. Liberals and radicals will then say that Johnny had less 'opportunity' than Mary to attend a good college. Conservatives usually reject this argument, insisting that Johnny and Mary had the same opportunity to attend a demanding college and that Johnny's decision reflects lack of 'motivation,' not 'opportunity'" (p. 48).

the racial and ethnic makeup of those track-choices are disaggregated, one finds disproportional numbers of whites on the college-bound tracks and a disproportional number of blacks and Hispanics on the track to nowhere.[34]

Complains the Committee on Policy for Racial Justice (1989): "because research findings consistently indicate the inflexibe track placements and rigid ability grouping segregate, stigmatize, and deny those in the bottom tracks the same access to quality education those in the upper tracks receive, we believe that these practices should be ended" (p. 36). Because of the representation of black and other low-income groups being over-represented in the low-ability tracks, institutional racism is held to exist.[35] Pressure is, accordingly, brought to bear on

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[34] For example, Jeannie Oakes' 1985 study, Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality, traces nearly 300 math and English classes nationwide, observing differences between students in high- and low-tracks. In comparison with the high-tracks, Oakes found that bottom groups generally focusing almost solely on basic and repetitive tasks, working often in silence filling out workbooks, being taught by less-experienced and less-qualified teachers, receiving less homework per night (13 minutes of English for the low-track vs. 43 minutes for the high), and spending less instructional "on-task" time in the classroom (240 hours per subject per year for the high-track students vs. 201 hours for the low-tracks). In brief, as a result of poor instruction and shallow content, the longer students stay in the bottom-track, the less likely they are to find their way out. Essentially, many futures are sealed, suggests Oakes in Multiplying Inequalities (1990), before a child leaves elementary school

[35] A 1982 U.S. Department of Education study found that only 21% of the nation's students of "low socioeconomic status" were enrolled in the academic track, compared to 63% of students regarded as "high socioeconomic status." Conversely, 35% of the disadvantaged students were found in the vocational track, compared to only 11% of advantaged students.

eliminating "tracking" as an educational policy with proposals for "detracking," and "cooperative learning" in its place.

Detracking entails mixing together learners of widely differing levels of ability for instruction. Just as handicapped children today are "mainstreamed" into regular classes, so too are the bright, the dull, and the average, producing a heterogeneously-grouped "regular" class. In such classes, cooperative learning is often promoted to mute differences further and reduce individual academic competition. In cooperative learning, the brighter students are paired-off or grouped-with less talented students to assist their classmates with learning the material. Usually the group's performance is measured rather than the individual's (Slavin,1989-90, 1990; Wells, Hirshberg, Lipton, & Oakes, 1995).

Not everyone is happy about detracking and cooperative learning. William Durden (1995), Johns Hopkins' Director of the Center for Talented Youth, comments that education's egalitarian leadership seems "moved by the vision of large numbers of students learning the same thing at the same time and with the same degree of accomplishment. They have replaced...equality of opportunity with...equality of achievement." As a result, students approach schooling with a "belief in a predetermined equality of achievement," leading to a "posture of entitlement, with its distorting effects lasting into adulthood" (p. 47).

Retorts Jonathan Kozol (1991) in Savage Inequalities, advantaged Americans will continue to resist all attempts at

equalization because "they are fighting for the right to guarantee their children the inheritance of an ascendant role in our society." He states:

> "There is a deep-seated reverence for fair play in the United States, and in many areas of life we see the conseqences in a genuine distaste for loaded dice; but this is not the case in education, health care, or inheritance of wealth. In these elemental areas we want the game to be unfair and we have made it so; and it will likely so remain" (p. 223).

How can such clashing views be resolved? Imagine two parents expressing nearly identical-but-different sentiments. The first parent, an advantaged person, says: Should I be expected to give-up my inalienable right to pursue happiness by sacrificing my child's future in the cognitive elite to make room for someone else's child? The second parent, disadvantaged, asks: Should I be expected to give-up my inalienable right to pursue happiness by sacrificing my child's future through putting-up with an educational system stacked forever against disadvantaged children?[36] If equality meant equal chances to be successful, Lieberman (1993) suggests, then a lottery system might be used,

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[36] Sadovnik, Cookson and Semel (1994) asked: Do schools reproduce inequality? They answer that "they do not, solely by themselves," being part of larger social systems that transmit inequalities across generations. Recognizing a degree of meritocracy with schools, they believe there is insufficient evidence to conclude that such meritocratic selection is based on individual talent and effort. "Rather, there is more powerful evidence...that schools are part of the process through which dominant groups maintain their advantages" (p. 462).

but that would achieve equality at a heavy price: "If luck instead of hard work decided the outcome, students' incentive to study would be weakened considerably" (p. 212).

Lieberman continues, pointing out the problem with equality-as-equal-prospects is that there is no agreed-upon way to apply it to students of differing talents and interests. He asks:

> "Consider the students in a seventh-grade homeroom. A has the talent and interest to be a nuclear scientist. B wants to be a beautician. C and D have average academic ability but no strong interests at this time. E wants to be a plumber. F plans to work in a family clothing store. And so on. With due regard for the unpredictability of talents and interests, what is required to equalize educational opportunities among these different students?" (p. 212).

Extending the above example further, how would their seventh grade teacher distribute his or her time among these students in a typical mixed-ability "regular" class of, say, twenty-five students? Christopher Jencks (1988) offers a possible framework for a classroom teacher to attempt to distribute his or her time among the students. He offers five possibilities for the teacher: (1) to devote time to the children who try hardest ("moralistic justice"); (2) to give time to the most disadvantaged students ("humane justice"); (3) to respond to the children who ask most for time ("myopic utilitarianism"); (4) to distribute time as the teacher thinks best for the long-term interests of society ("enlightened utilitarianism"); and (5) to give each child an

exactly equal amount of time ("democratic equality").

Without attempting to elaborate further, it should be apparent that attempting to address the problem of providing "equal prospects" in a school setting is fraught with difficulties. Despite brave attempts to reform American education, the practical day-to-day inconsistencies of the typical classroom and school district, the differing parental and student expectations and demands (or lack there-of), the differences of view and talent among teachers and "helping-others" in the education process, all conspire to make "equal prospects" an issue rather than a "given."[37]

The School-Home Issue

Fishkin's third condition for the American concept of equal opportunity dealt with the autonomy of the family -- that is, "consensual relations within a given family governing the development of its children should not be coercively interfered

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[37] Lieberman (1993) takes issue with the implications of James Coleman's (1988) inferred conclusion that achieving complete equality of opportunity is impossible and, therefore, equal opportunity becomes meaningless. Lieberman offers two arguments against accepting such an inference. First, even if equality is difficult-to-impossible to attain, it does not render the concept useless -- the fact that we acannot establish a colony on a distant galaxy, for example, does not render the concept meaningless, only impossible to fulfill at the present. Second, while we may not know what to do in certain situations to attain equality of prospects, research has been useful in telling us what not to do (p. 216).

Coleman, however, appears to be saying something different: that "there can be imcompatibility between high levels of (student) performance -- on the average as well as the upper end of the distribution -- and equality of educational performance" and "that high average levels of performance can occur without leaving a segment of students far behind" (p. 390) -- a slightly different argument.

with except to ensure for the children the essential prerequisites for adult participation in society" (p. 16). It would be hard to find a social institution more important to most Americans than their families, particularly their children.

Yet it is equally clear that children's "social capital" -- that is, the norms, social networks, and relationships between children and adults that are of value for the child's growth (Coleman, 1987) -- has been declining over the last thirty years. Just as a flower needs relationships with the warmth of the sun, the water from rain, and nutriments from the soil to grow and develop, so too does a child need relationships with his or her environment, relationships regarded as "social capital."

Historically, the major source of a child's social capital has been his or her family. Families with social capital are close; parents and children share warmth, trust, and support.

But these conditions have been changing. Many families are experiencing a deficit in social capital. In 1985, Harold Hodgkinson shocked many Americans with this portrait of NORMAL childhood experiences:

> "Of every 100 children born today: 12 will be born out of wedlock; 40 will be born to parents who divorce before the child is 18; 5 will be born to parents who separate; 2 will be born to parents of whom one will die before the child reaches 18; 41 will reach age 18 'normally'" (p. 3).

In 1990, with 1,175,000 American couples being divorced, 1,045,750 children were left as flotsam in the wake of divorce

(Kantrowitz, 1992), bringing their social capital deficits to school with them -- deeply upset children whose worlds' have come apart through no fault of their own. These are children (at the rate of a million a year) who will need re-assurance that they are "okay people" and not second-class "latchkey kids" who have to forge for themselves in what must seem to them as an out-of-control adult world. And these are just the children of formerly married parents, many "advantaged" -- not the illegitimate children of unmarried mothers (typically teenage) that characterize 22% of all births to white mothers and 68% of all births to black women (80% in the inner cities)(Murray, 1993). Comments Hodgkinson: "The situation is most striking with very young mothers, age 13 and 14. Indeed, every day in America, 40 teenage girls give birth to their THIRD child...To be the third child of a child is to be very much 'at risk' in terms of one's future" (p.3). Indeed!

Such statistics and profiles have brought with them new sets of publicly-asked questions and comments -- "Is the family obsolete?" (Eisenberg, 1995), "Are parents bad for children?" (Mack, 1994), "Putting children last" (Eberstadt, 1995), and so on. When we consider today's environment, the public "ethos" in which we raise children, what can be done to bolster the deficit in social capital for a growing number of our children? If family autonomy is to be respected; if one "treats equals equally and unequals unequally;" what should be done?

The search for answers to these questions brings us directly

to the heart of the school-home issue. As suggested by Coleman (1990), noting the continuous decline in the social capital of children, two directions are possible, expressed as questions:

-Should we attempt to restore and bolster the authority and responsibility of parents for their children, insisting that they fulfill their parental duties regarding their childrens' welfare and development?

-Or, should we seek to enlarge further the role, control, and mechanisms of government -- especially schools -- to assume the responsibilities and duties of role-defaulting parents?

It is probably the resolution of this issue in America's struggle for equality that represents the greatest threat to the public school's continuance as an institution familiar to us all. Standing on one side are the bulk of American parents, most conservatives, and those waving the "family values" banner; standing on the other side are the Educational Establishment, most liberals, a growing number of parents[38], and those believing that government intrusion is an act of compassion. At one extreme

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[38] Dana Mack (1994) offers an insight into the thinking of this growing group, a group often much concerned about child abuse: "(B)y imagining that even their own highly permissive parents were authoritarians who abused them; by buying into the theory that parenthood is inherently pathological; and by assuming the competency of schools and communal institutions to raise children or, worse, of children to raise themselves -- the notoriously self-regarding baby-boom generation, now become parents themselves, can also imagine that they are doing the right thing in failing or refusing to accept full responsibility for the physical care and the moral education of their own children" (emphasis added, p. 35).

is the American edition of the Japanese "education mama," wheedling her children to achieve a place among the cognitive elite; at the other extreme, the stereotyped crack-addicted teenage mother willing to sell her children for a fix. At one side are people concerned that school and government policies pose a threat to their relationship with their children, to their children's future, and to the diminishment of family autonomy by a rising "Nanny-State" (e.g, Dobson & Bauer, 1990; Reed, 1994). On the other side are people who believe that trained professionals are better for children as parental surrogates than most parents[39] (Mack, 1994; J.R. Martin, 1995), that the self-fulfillment of being a parent transcends obligations to one's children (Thurer, 1995), and that real equality can only be

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[39] Jane Roland Martin (1995) offers an increasingly popular rationale among educators for expanding the parental role of the school. Pointing to the changing American home and family -- with many households headed by a single parent, usually a mother, or with two working parent just trying to maintain a home -- she notes, "for many hours of each day there is simply no one home...To put it starkly, there is now a great domestic vacuum in the lives of children from all walks of life" (p. 356). What is needed, she says, is a "moral equivalent of home" -- not to abolish homes, but to share responsibilities "for those educative functions of home that are now at risk." These functions entail "needs" all children have -- needs to be loved and to love, to feel safe and secure, to be at ease with themselves, to experience intimacy and affection, to be perceived as unique individuals and treated as such. Our "factory model" of schooling supposed that homes met these needs before the children arrived, "preprocessed" from home and ready to learn with parents being partners in the educational process.

Unfortunately, today's home for many children no longer can be counted upon to meet these needs. Thus we require a new goal: to turn "our schoolhouses into schoolhomes," an environment projecting "a larger point of view": "that this nation itself -- and ultimately the whole world of nations and the planet Earth -- (is) a moral equivalent of home" (p. 359).

achieved by hands-on government, family autonomy notwhithstanding (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; McClaren, 1989).

The irony is that both sides are right: We do need to bolster the authority of parents and to insist that they attend to their children's welfare; and, at the same time, we do need either government or some other agency (or agencies) to assume responsiblities for the increasing number of children of role-defaulting parents. Reform efforts notwithstanding, our ability to address both of these needs is undermined by the lack of trust and suspicion that enjoins both sides of the school-home issue. Because it involves that possibility of altering traditional child-parent relationships toward a parent-child-government school relationship in the name of promoting "equal prospects," the issue carries high sensitivities. Many parents bridle at the thought of government's finger placed more visibly on the "parenting scale."

In Coleman and Hoffer's study, Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities (1987), a distinction is drawn between "functional communities" (where, for example, families attend religious services together, get to know one another, and thereby assist families in their community to pass-on their values from generation to generation) and "value communities" (where people share similar values about education and childrearing but who are not a functional community). In earlier times, public schools in more homogeneous attendance areas were able to fulfill both the functional and value community roles.

Today, however, this ability no longer exists in many school districts. That is, many public schools are grounded in no community, with attendance zones drawing student populations frequently finding little in common to share.[40] The result, claim Coleman and Hoffer, has been a trend toward lower support for the public schools.

The school-home issue and the Coleman-Hoffer distinctions of functional and value communities are linked, it would appear. While it may be difficult for the public school to play the role of the functional community, it must make a case to win public respect as a value community. The work of Jane Martin (1995), Nel Noddings (1992), Ted Sizer (1992) and others may assist in directing us to a stronger sense of sharing in a value community. Where failing efforts to win the support of parents and other adults to the school's value community are evident, one can anticipate rising public pressure for vouchers and other educational options. Despite a growing number of instances where today's parents put themselves before the interest of their children, too many parents care too much about their children and

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[40] Neil Postman (1979) suggests that when institutions like the family, the church, and voluntary associations yield portions of their functions to government agencies like the public schools, they loose their own abilities to function effectively (a theme echoed in Marivn Olasky's The Tragedy of American Compassion, 1992). Postman states: "If the school...assumes the prerogatives normally exercised by the family, the family loses some of its motivation, authority and competence to provide what it is designed to do." Blurring lines of authority have tended to create conditions for no one to be responsible (p.115) -- a strong possibility for the "no community" school district.

their children's future. While they would like to see all Americans equal in the eyes of each other, they certainly are not inclined to place their own children at risk in places where conditions favor their children becoming less-than-equal and accomplishing less-than-expected. In part, the rising home-schooling movement of parents educating their own children attests to the intensity and commitment of some parents[41] (Van Galen & Pittman, 1990; Hot, 1982). In the struggle for equality, it would appear that "family" trumps "equality."

ESTABLISHING AN INSTRCUTIONAL PRIORITY FOR AMERICANS TO SEE EACH OTHER AS EQUALS

It has been contended here that most Americans accept -- usually in the abstract -- a belief that there should be equality before God, before the law, and before humanity in the sense that we all share basic human needs. It is this sense of equality that makes us equal in the eyes of each other. Complicating this vision, however, is the use of the other "unalienable rights" given to us as Americans as well as the 24-hour day equality. These conditions permit us to work ourselves as hard as we decide

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[41] Getting exact numbers of the children involved in home schooling is tricky. The Department of Education estimates that about 1500 students were being home-schooled in the early 1980s, rising to 350,000 students by 1992. The Home School Legal Defense Association says the number today is higher, about 500,000 (Manatt, 1995, p. 130).

and toward becoming whatever we spend our 24-hours, day-after-day, trying to become. For some, it may mean "being the best they can be" in whatever they attempt, or even "being better than..." any competitor. For others, it may mean simply "getting along," or just "making do." Whatever. The outcome of these differential strivings by persons of differential talents is, unsurprisingly, differential results -- inequalities.

The presence of these inequalities do not bother some persons as long as access to compete for the rewards of striving is open to all. But these inequalities do bother others if they appear to be disproportional inequalities between specific groups of people, especially people labelled "disadvantaged." And any inequalities of outcomes really bother those egalitarians who believe that there should be no inequalites, as Lyndon Johnson said, "in fact."

Historically, public education in America has served as THE doorway to most Americans for access to mainstream society, for purposes of social mobility, and for realizing one's own version of the American Dream. Initially, it was held that the task of school government was to set unequal persons into a system of laws, policies, and educational procedures that would, as nearly as possible, equalize their rights while allowing their differences to express themselves. It was recognized, nevertheless, that in the struggle for equality, the upper-middle class appeared to be "a little more equal" in the laws, policies, and educational procedures of the public schools than other

groups. In short, they were "advantaged." With the Civil Rights and liberation movements bringing these inequalities to light in the 1960s and thereafter, the public schools could no longer leave the education of the "disadvantaged" unaddressed. The ascendent belief became that government should be responsible for creating the equality of condition that society failed to do by its own devices. The assumption grew that eqalitarianism is the "correct" ideal for Americans, regardless of its incompatibility with our inalienable rights to be different.

Continued political pressure for results caused many persons to support more extreme measures for ensuring equality (the affirmative action vision) by giving special preferences ("treating unequals unequally") to the disadvantaged. This effort is supported by many of the advantaged. In part, the basis for their support stems from concern over the political consequences of failing to deal with the inequality issue, as well as for humane reasons. The support of the advantaged is generally expressed in terms of compassion for human dignity rather than concern over consequences lest one appear "insensitive."

In the process of attempting to deal with inequality in the schools, education employes at least two strategies believed to promote greater equality of outcomes between groups: de-emphasizing the individual striving of the advantaged, and empowering the disadvantaged. As a result of often being ignorant of the consequences of particular policies as well as having an exaggerated faith in the power of government and education to

solve problems of inequality, many mixed results are achieved. In the politics of equality, fresh instances of new inequalities must be found for large bureaucracies to stay in the business of policing for inequalities, demanding ever-greater appropriations to attack the new problems. Thus, it becomes hard ever to reach agreement concerning whether the conditions of equality are satisfied.[42]

Admitting that Fishkin's three conditions for equal opportunity to flourish in our American setting are unworkable, that there are no "pure-play" or "sure-fire" ways of escaping problems attendant to either vision of equality, what can be said about ordering the school's instructional priorities for pursuing a form of equality that enables Americans to be equal in the eyes of each other? As we line-up instructional possibilities for the 21st century, which possibility would matter most?[43] What should

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[42] In a recent speech on this subject, President Clinton (Purdum, 1995) stated: "Affirmative action has not always been perfect, and affirmative action should not go on forever...I am resolved that that day will come, but the evidence suggests, indeed screams, that that day has not come. The job of ending discrimination in this country is not over" (p. A1).

[43] For the curious person who may wonder what the range of possibilities might include, let me offer a random list (with apologies if I inadvertently omitted someone's favorite):

teacher-centered instruction, student-centered instruction, bilingual education, the Great Books, school choice, vouchers, individualized instruction, accelerated learning, mastery learning, cooperative learning, multiculturalism, outcome-based-education, whole language instruction, career education, competency-based instruction, the comprehensive curriculum, core curriculum, global education, flexible scheduling, team-teaching, non-graded instruction, home instruction, home schooling, mainstreaming, modular scheduling, open education, self-contained education, ability grouping, sex education, year-round school,

be the public schools' top priority?

While many instructional programs, practices, and procedures suggest themselves, it is "character education" that is settled-upon here as being the most useful, the most needed for our task to succeed. If what we mean by "character" is "the psychological muscles that allow a person to control impulses and defer gratification, which is essential for achievement, performance, and moral conduct" (Etzioni, 1993, p.91); then "character education" means putting values in action to produce "good character." In Tom Lickona's (1991) words: "Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good" (p. 51).

More than any of the other possibilities considered, character education appears to possess the greatest potential for promoting a condition of equality that might enhance the realization of Americans to be equal in the eyes of each other. Character depends neither on cognitive ability or merit, nor is it bounded by race, gender, or ethnicity. More than any other personal attribute, character determines a basis for respect, the prime factor in the perception of equality between people. Unlike "reputation," something others bestow upon one, character represents the essential you, the who-and-what-you-are in human qualities. Unfortunately, the term, "character education," does not connote the "silver-bullet" excitement of a dazzling new

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values clarification, affective education, site-based management, vocational education, critical thinking skills, peer education, character education, phonics, the 3Rs, the 3Cs, and so on.

educational innovation -- something radically new may not be needed. William Kilpatrick (1992) explains:

> "It's an old alternative, to be sure, but a large part of our education consists in rediscovering things we once knew to be true but forgot. In looking at them again, we often see that, however demanding they may be, there is really no workable alternative to them. The traditional character education model seems to be one of those basic forms to which we must always eventually turn" P. 26).

And return to it we must. As Robert Bellah (Lickona, 1991) notes: "It was the deep belief of the founders that the republic could succeed only with virtuous citizens. Only if there was a moral law within would citizens be able to maintain a free government" (p. xiii). If today's home features less "working parent"-"latchkey child" relationships; if other community agencies are reported less able to inculcate socializing influences on children; and if the growth of "no-community" schools symbolizes few shared values and lessened public support; the possibilities grow for children to depend increasingly on their peers and television media for the acquisition of their "moral law within." And what moral-laws-within are being taught on the TV "soaps" and afternoon talk-shows?[44]

Perhaps the inner city gang cultures offer a "worse case" example, where the growing population of fatherless boys create a

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[44] Newton Minow and Craig LeMay give a harrowing account of what is taught to our children in Abandoned in the Wasteland: Children, Television, and the First Amendment (1995).

Lord of the Flies culture writ large, representing "the values of unsocialized male adolescents made norms -- physical violence, immediate gratification, and predatory sex" (Murray, 1993, p. A14). It is "a spiritually dead teen-age culture built on aimlessness, casual cruelty and empty pleasure...These kids' future is empty and their future is now" (Maslin, 1995, pp. C1, C5). Amitai Etzioni (1993) sums-up the need for character education today:

> "Youngsters are enrolled in many public schools -- and quite a few private ones -- with their characters under-developed and without a firm commitment to values. The basic reason is that the families have been dismembered or the parents are overworked or consumed by other concerns and ambitions. As a result, the children tend to be poor students. Moreover, if their lack of character and moral values are not attended to while at school, they will graduate to become deficient workers, citizens, and fellow community members" (pp. 89-90).

In a recent speech on affirmative action, President Clinton (1995) referred to a challenge for all Americans, one whose realization undergirds the ability of Americans to be equal in the eyes of each other: "Our challenge is twofold: first, to restore the American dream of opportunity and the American value of responsibility; and second, to bring our country together amid all our diversity into a stronger community so that we can find common ground and move forward as one" (p. B10). A strong

national focus on character education could be the means for accomplishing President Clinton's challenge.

Because the teaching of values is involved if one is to speak of "good character," a challenge can be anticipated: "Whose values/morals/virtues (take your pick) are you going to teach?" This question is normally followed by a depiction of the character-education advocate as an Authoritarian bent on IMPOSING his or her values on others. Michael Sandel (1984) explains the philosophical reason for the "whose values?" question:

> "Kantian liberals need an account of rights that does not depend on utilitarian considerations. More than this, they need an account that does not depend on any particular conception of the good, that does not presuppose the superiority of one way of life over others. Only a justification neutral among ends could preserve the liberal resolve not to favor any particular ends, or to impose on its citizens a preferred way of life" (p. 3).

Philosophically, communitarian critics of the liberal rights-based view argue that we cannot view ourselves as independent individuals with the "priority of the self over its ends," always able to stand back to survey options and make free choices. No, say the communitarians, much of our identity is shaped, by necessity, on the many roles one plays. Because we join with others in playing such roles, we are partly defined by the communities we inhabit. That is, we are implicated in the purposes and ends characteristic of such communities. "They

situate us in the world, and give our lives their moral particularity" (pp. 5-6).[45]

It is philosophically appealing to imagine the individual free to make whatever choices of life-style and other matters he or she decides. In large measure, it represents the freedom that defines America. But, on the other hand, when the choices are increasingly being left to underage minors by parental-default, when the choices-made select a future that is "empty and now," when the values choosen include aimlessness, cruelty, immediate gratification, and predatory sex as a way-of-life, then the issue of freedom-to-choose needs to be re-examined.[46] The selections create difficulties-for and limits the freedom-of other members of the larger society who find themselves bound and obligated by law to accept responsibility (through taxes, public services, etc.) for the consequences of these juvenile choices. As Americans, we are defined by more than a collection of rights. We share a society -- albeit, one with many freedoms -- but a society that depends on our sharing some notions of what "good character" entails, what "the moral law within" should be and must be if we are not to become merely a fragmented and

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[45] Amitai Etzioni's book, The Spirit of Community: The Reinvention of American Society (1993) eloquently develops the communitarian view in detail and is strongly supportive of recognizing a need for character education.

[46] Anthropologist Robin Fox (1975) expresses things nicely: "If, indeed, everything is learned, then surely men can be taught to live in any kind of society. Man is at the mercy of all the tyrants...who think they know what is best for him. And how can he plead that they are being inhuman if he doesn't know what being human is in the first place?" (pp. 17-18).

balkinized chunk of geography.

The task of character education is not and should not be exclusively the school's task. The home and parents should remain the major site for character education. In the sense of the old African saying,"it takes a whole village to educate a child," character education is the responsibilty of the whole culture ultimately. It is important, however, to recognize the need of the schools to reflect and to reinforce the values, morals, and virtues being espoused in the homes, the religious institutions, and the other agencies in the community. Much of our current difficulty derives from a lack of consensus and follow-through on these matters. Not surprisingly, many school districts have learned to play-it-safe politically by generally ignoring this issue (thereby contributing to their status as "no community" schools). Comments Kilpatrick (1992):

> "To the extent that character formation takes place in school, much of it is accomplished through the spirit and atmosphere of a school, its sports and symbols, its activities and assemblies, its purposes and priorities, its codes of conduct and responsibility -- most of all, through its teachers and the quality of their example" (p. 26).[47]

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[47] In The De-Valuing of America (1992), W. Bennett offers this description of Martin Buber's interpretation of a teacher: "(T)he educator is distinguished from all other influences 'by his will to take part in the stamping of character and by his consciousness that he represents in the eyes of the growing person a certain selection of what is, the selection of what is 'right,' of what should be.' It is in this will, Buber says, in this clear standing for something, that the 'vocation as an educator finds its fundamental expression" (pp. 58-59).

There are signs of encouragement that a national consensus may be possible. In particular, the favorable response of people from different political perspectives to William Bennett's The Book of Virtues (1993) is particularly promising. In it, Bennett offers a series of readings from all walks of life and in different voices clustered around ten "virtues" -- self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty, and faith. In many ways, Bennett appears to have put-together an apparently acceptable modern-day McGuffey Reader that parents can read to their children and teachers to their classes. More importantly, it features virtues most Americans should find easy to accept, to share with other Americans, and to inculcate in their children to develop "children of good character."

In The Moral Sense (1993), James Q. Wilson reaches a conclusion:

> "(A)n older view of human nature than is now current in the human sciences and moral philosophy is the correct view; thinking seriously about the kinds of animals we are will help us understand our peristent but fragile disposition to make moral judgments and the aspects of human relations that must be cultivated if that disposition is to be protected and nurtured. We are human, with all the frailties and inconsistencies that this implies; but we also wish, when we observe ourselves with any sort of detachmen· to avoid becoming less than human" (p. xv).

Character education works toward protecting us against seeing each other as "less than human," hence unequal. Rather, it assists in helping Americans look equal in the eyes of each other. It is a means for articulating the principles that America was founded upon: equality before the law, equal treatment by the state, and freedom as the guiding principle of our society. Character education undergirds an understanding, a "moral law within," that for individuals to achieve success, it "has to be won, not provided -- fought for, not fought over" (Sullivan, 1995, p. E15). Providing that instructional priority ought to be education's role in America's struggle with equality.

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